

AFFAIRS OF THE WEEK IN THE PLAYHOUSES

PLAYS & PLAYERS

"How to See Plays"—About "The Blue Bird"—At the Bantbox.

By HECTOR TURNBULL.

A VOLUME containing scholarly and comprehensive analyses of plays, past and present, just published by Richard Burton, bears the somewhat startling title, "How to See a Play." Upon casual examination the book will strike the specialist in plays, the playwright, or the poor wretch who is obliged to report new plays for his livelihood, as a sort of misdirected effort. Why, these few will say, is it necessary or helpful to supply the thrice blessed layman with a set of facts that can only distract his mind from the effect of the play as a whole and make him conscious of an effort to tear down the fabric of the drama as the players build it up before his eyes? Is the illusion or the machinery of the drama the more important to the theatregoer? Cannot the layman be allowed to judge of a play from his experience of life or his intellectual receptivities without a specialized knowledge of the sweatings and pains involved in achieving an exit or a striking climax? Why not, we say at first thought, write a tome on "How to Read Books," or "How to Listen to Lectures"?

These questions which are bound to arise in the minds of the professional playgoer, however, should be dispelled upon reading Mr. Burton's series of studies, for his sincerity gives a new significance to the title. His book can be recommended to every theatregoer interested in the new movement now apparent in the drama in this country, and will prove, if not a formal guide, at least a means of broadening one's powers of appreciation.

If it had not been for Gerorgette Le Blanc, the wife of Maurice Maeterlinck, "The Blue Bird," which will be presented Monday at the Manhattan Opera House, would probably now be gathering dust in one of the nooks and crannies of the old Norway Abbey of the Benedictines at Saint Wandrille, Normandy. In outlining it Maeterlinck believed it too fantastic for the play form, but Mme. Maeterlinck, who is an actress and accomplished stage directress, immediately saw in it dramatic possibilities. She turned Maeterlinck's first idea of making it merely a story into the design which he has so successfully followed. Even when it was finished Maeterlinck threw up his hands and exclaimed: "Why, those scenes can never be presented! They are dream scenes, and I have let my fancy do the impossible." But Mme. Maeterlinck answered, "Nothing is impossible on the stage."

The play was published in book form and had already passed into ten editions when the group of directors who control the little Theatre Artistique in Moscow, Russia, were persuaded to experiment with the piece. The poet's wife went to Moscow with designs for scenery and costumes that she had made. Those of the directors who had been the least bit timid previously were so fascinated by her conception of how the poem might be realized that they resolved to go ahead regardless of expense, though compromising to an extent by eliminating three or four scenes.

The history of the play in Russia is well known. The production, which had been looked upon as doubtful at the Theatre Artistique, ran for more than two years, and so overwhelming was its success that fifty-two provincial companies were organized, with much more simple scenery, to tour with it throughout Russia.

But even then the producers in the larger foreign capitals believed it to be one of those freak plays which occasionally appeal to one country and not to another. Mme. Maeterlinck, however, had so supreme a faith in the play that she was determined that it should be tried out in one of the other capitals. Whatever Maeterlinck himself lacks in executive skill Mme. Maeterlinck supplies, and before Herbert Trench, who had produced several of Maeterlinck's previous plays, was really aware what he was doing Mme. Maeterlinck had brought him over to Moscow to witness the production there. Then she revealed to him her larger plan of making her production even more elaborate until it combined pantomime, drama and spectacular effects.

"I am sure," said Mme. Maeterlinck to this London producer, "that the play will express to the great mass of theatregoers a new and nobler message; that is why I am striving for a production that will do justice to Maeterlinck's work."

Mme. Maeterlinck gave up her own plans and devoted herself for more than two months to sketching out the production which Herbert Trench finally agreed to make. For two weeks Mme. Maeterlinck was tutored by an electrical expert that she might thoroughly understand the principles of lighting. She made a study, too, of the transformation effects that had been used in the great British pantomime, and ingeniously contrived others. She proved an indefatigable worker, and Mr. Trench declared that the successful London production would have been impossible without her. And when "The Blue Bird" was brought across the Atlantic and announced at the New Theatre, New York City, again her wit and resourcefulness were essential to its success. Not only were Mme. Maeterlinck's plans and sketches used here, but she was in constant correspondence with Winthrop Ames, suggesting and counselling many improvements in the play.

"Love of One's Neighbor," by the Russian writer, Leonid Andreyev, is one of the plays to be given by the Washington Square Players on their second bill at the Bantbox Theatre. The date for the first performance of the new bill is Friday evening, March 26. The original plan was to give it a week earlier, but owing to the demand for seats for the first bill, it was decided to continue the present bill an extra week, with performances Thursday, Friday, Saturday matinee and evening, March 18 to 20. The Washington Square Players, who opened at the Bantbox on February 19, play on Friday and Saturday nights of each week, and have not only appeared at each performance to a sold-out house, but have turned numbers of would-be purchasers of tickets away. In addition to the Andreyev play, there will be four other one-act plays on the second bill. John Reed, who will return to Europe next week to continue his work as a war correspondent, has a play, "Moon Down," on the bill. Philip Moeller, one of the producing staff of the Washington Square Players, also has a play entitled "Two Blind Beggars and One Less Blind." "My Lady's Honor," by Murdoch Pemberton, is a modern comedy. The fifth number is a pantomime in black and white, written by Holland Hudson, a member of the Washington Square Players.

The fact that the D. W. Griffith film, "The Birth of a Nation," now credited with a remarkably successful engagement at the Liberty Theatre, is playing twice daily to a \$2 scale of admission will hardly be a welcome piece of news to the theatrical managers on Broadway. After such an example of the moneymaking power of spectacular feature films offering a peg of uplift upon which to hang sensation, nothing short of a deluge of similar photo dramas can be expected in the immediate future.

HOW TO POSE

Jane Grey Gives Recipe for a Successful Photograph.

Having your picture taken, says Jane Grey, of "Kick In," at the Republic Theatre, is a different operation than it was in the old days when the man

behind the camera placed his victim bolt upright in a straight-backed chair, fastened a clamp on the back of his head that kept it in the most unnatural and uncomfortable position, stuck a card at a crooked angle on a stick and stuck the stick quite out of the normal range of vision, and with a smirk as spontaneous and expressive as was ever painted on a wax dummy, bade the un-

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